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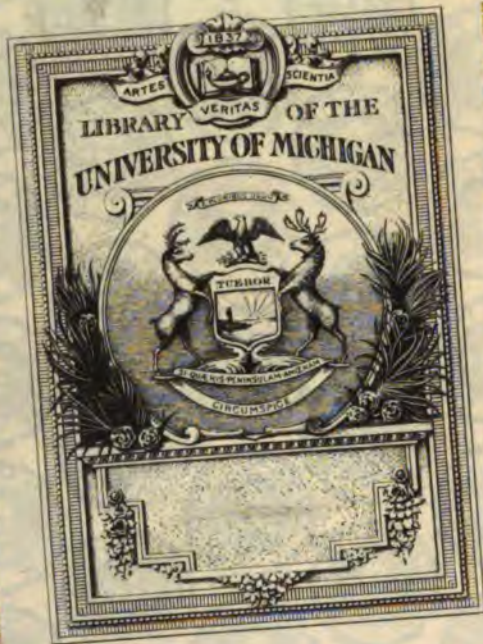
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CONVERSION of St. PAUL:

A

POETICAL ESSAY.

By JOHN LETTICE, M.A. 1737-1832

FELLOW of SIDNEY-SUSSEX COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

CAMBRIDGE:

Printed by J. BENTHAM Printer to the UNIVERSITY;
For T. & J. MERRILL Booksellers in *Cambridge*; and sold by B. DOD & Co.
in *Ave-Mary Lane*, J. DODSLEY in *Pall-Mall*, J. WHISTON & B. WHITE in *Fleet-Street London*; J. FLETCHER, and D. PRINCE in *Oxford*.

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English
P. 18. 27
14 4 14

A Clause of Mr. SEATON's Will,
Dated Oct. 8. 1738.

I Give my Kissingbury Estate to the University of Cambridge for ever: the Rents of which shall be disposed of yearly by the Vice-Chancellor for the time being, as he the Vice-Chancellor, the Master of Clare-Hall, and the Greek Professor for the time being, or any two of them shall agree. Which three persons aforesaid shall give out a Subject, which Subject shall for the first year be one or other of the Perfections or Attributes of the Supreme Being, and so the succeeding Years, till the Subject is exhausted; and afterwards the Subject shall be either Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell, Purity of Heart, &c. or whatever else may be judged by the Vice-Chancellor, Master of Clare-Hall, and Greek Professor, to be most conducive to the honour of the Supreme Being and recommendation of Virtue. And they shall yearly dispose of the Rent of the above Estate to that Master of Arts, whose Poem on the Subject given shall be best approved by them. Which Poem I ordain to be always in English, and to be printed; the expence of which shall be deducted out of the product of the Estate, and the residue given as a reward for the Composer of the Poem, or Ode, or Copy of Verses.

WE the underwritten, do assign Mr. SEATON's Reward to J. LETTICE, M. A. for his Poem on THE CONVERSION of ST. PAUL; and direct the said Poem to be printed, according to the Tenor of the Will.

Dec. 24,
1764.

J. Barnardiston Vice-Chan.
P. S. Goddard Master of Clare-Hall.
M. Lort Greek Professor.

m R K

THE
CONVERSION of ST. PAUL:
A
POETICAL ESSAY.

“ **Y**ES—gentle Shade (Heav’n on thy bounty
“ smile!)
“ The lib’ral Purpose of thy glowing Heart
“ Breaths nought save Peace, Religion, and the Love
“ Of sacred Verse. Thou woo’st the mystic Pow’rs
“ That frame sweet Numbers to the golden Lyre,
“ To fly those turbid Regions, where, contemn’d

" The chaster Honours of pœtic Lore,
 "~~Loft all the Dignity of antient Song,~~
 " Long have they chanted to the frantic Voice
 " Of civil Discord, and fraternal Rage
 " Responsive. May thy gen'rous urgent Call
 " Allure the Wand'ers to *Cam*'s hallow'd Groves,
 " Once more to fill these much-neglected Shades
 " With sweetest Minstrelsy of magic Sounds.

Such Answer from the Voice of Fancy flow'd,
 As late, methought, some Vision's airy Charm
 Call'd to my View the venerable Shade
 Of SEATON, much lamenting that the Muse
 Regardless of th' exalted Province, erst
 Asserted with such jealous Care, should yield
 Her Lyre divine, her high enchanting Strains
 To Spleen, Revenge and unrelenting Hate,
 The baleful Offspring of disastrous Times.

Come then, sweet Chantress of celestial Airs!
 Inspire thy suppliant Vot'ry, whilst he sings
 The Man of Tarsus, from Gamaliel's Feet
 Rais'd to the Converse of the living God.

How thick that Cloud! that Darkneſs how profound!
Which o'er the mental Sight blind Prejudice
Sufpends, impervious to the brighteſt Rays
Of moral Evidence. Ah zealous Saint!
Had Heav'n to Thee vouchsaf'd no ſtronger Light
To guide thy devious Foot-ſteps through the Gloom
Of Error's Maze, long as the vital Stream
Had warm'd thy dauntleſs Heart, the ſwelling Pride
That Nature gave, th' unconquerable Rage
Of Jewiſh Bigotry, the callous Senſe
Deaf to the Charmer Reaſon's Call, ſo long
Had chain'd to Earth thy captivated Soul.
But—Gracious Pow'rs! what Burſt of blazing Light!
Lo! where th' effulgent Streams of purer Day,
Surpaſſing far the Radiance of the Morn
Fiſt riſing o'er the Bow'rs of Paradife,
Spring from Heav'n's azure Canopy! And hark!
Some Voice tremendous, like the fearful Roar
Of ruſhing Cataracts, pervades the Air —
“Saul! Saul! what Madneſs lifts thine impious Arm
“To brave th' Omnipotence of Heav'n? Forbear
“Raſh Mortal! Check thine unavailing Rage,

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“ Nor longer with eternal Adamant †
 “ Wage fruitless War. What? Can an Insect’s Sting
 “ Rift the firm Oak? Or shall the Lion fall
 “ A recreant Victim to the timid Lamb?—
 “ With Rev’rence wait the high Behests of Heav’n;
 “ And know, proud Reptile! ’tis that Sov’reign Pow’r,
 “ Th’immortal God thy Fury braves, whose Voice
 “ Arrests thine Ear.” Soon as the first Alarm,
 That lock’d each Sense in dumb Astonishment,
 Had ceas’d, the prostrate Seer, with trembling Tongue,
 The heav’nly Vision fearfully address’d—
 “ O! Source divine of Love and Goodness! lo!st
 “ In the wild Transports of th’impassion’d Soul,
 “ Terror, Remorse, Hope, Gratitude and Joy
 “ By turns triumphant o’er each captive Thought,
 “ What shall I speak, or how be silent? Deign;
 “ Eternal Spirit! to declare thy Will :
 “ Say, why vouchsaf’d thy Presence, why display’d
 “ Thy Glories to a Reptile of the Dust?”
 He ceas’d.— The Voice celestial thus reply’d —

† Ἀδάμαντα πείν — carried with it, among the Antients, the same
 proverbial Import as — πρὸς τὰ κέντρα λακτίζειν.

“ Arise!

“ Arise! to fair Damascus’ Walls pursue
 “ Thy destin’d Course; there shall the deep Decrees
 “ Of Heav’n, e’er long, to thine illumin’d Sense,
 “ Unclouded shine.” Obedient rose the Seer
 Of God high-favour’d; but behold! his Eyes
 Plung’d in the Torrent of th’ empyreal Blaze
 To dreary Night consign’d. Th’ obsequious Train,
 The Partners of his fell vindictive Zeal,
 Speechless with Horror, guide his painful Steps
 To the fam’d City. Three long tedious Days
 An Exile from the chearful Sun, no Food,
 No Draught refreshing to his Wants supply’d,
 There did he ponder, in his chearless Breast,
 The Mazes of th’ Almighty’s Will. Three Days
 Expir’d, by Heav’n’s propitious Guidance led,
 Arriv’d the Minister of Light. He spoke
 The magic Word of Faith; and instant fell
 The Vail of Darkness from the Zealot’s Eye.
 Once more the vivid Splendor of the Sun
 He saw, and thus pour’d forth th’ extatic Joy
 “ Hail blessed Orb! ætherial Brightness hail!
 “ Welcome! the genial Luxury of Light; .

“ Thrice welcome it's Return! But Oh! what Words
“ Shall hail the Day-spring of immortal Truth!
“ What Words can paint the Radiance of her Beams
“ First darting on the Soul! Purg'd the thick Film
“ Of Jewish Ignorance from Reason's Eye,
“ Now stand reveal'd the wise, the wond'rous Schemes
“ Of Providence. I see, confess, adore
“ The Miracle of Mercy, Grace and Love,
“ Vouchsaf'd Man's guilty Race, vouchsaf'd e'en Me!

Th' enraptur'd Convert ceas'd. The sacred Lymph,
Mysterious Prelude of regenerate Life!
Confirm'd th' auspicious Change. Faith, Fortitude,
Light-winged Hope, and the cherubic Throng,
That, with the ductile Spirit of the Soul
Congenial, still attend on Virtue's Paths,
Hov'ring around Heav'n's fav'rite Profelyte,
Fix on his Breast their adamantine Seal.

Each holy Rite perform'd, the zealous Saint
Pour'd from his Tongue spontaneous the Stream
Of Eloquence and Inspiration. Lo!

The gazing Synagogue, in wonder wrapt,
Devour his pregnant Speech. 'Th' instructive Sage
With simple Stile, deliberate Address
And nervous Argument, now vindicates
The great Messiah, Now with Words that live,
With Thoughts that burn, the last tremendous Day,
Expiring Nature and the Doom of Man
He thunders on the Soul. Sin's ghastly Front,
Her Shape deform'd, the Poison of her Touch,
Behind Her Vengeance with eternal Fire
He next describes. Affrighted Conscience 'wakes;
The Murd'rer starts aghast! th' Oppressor groans;
Th' Adulterer trembles, and the Harlot weeps.
What Heart so pure, so innocent of Vice,
But shudder'd there?—Now with mellifluous Tongue,
He sooths the Scorpion-sting of conscious Guilt.
Behold! each faded Countenance relum'd
With Hope and Gladness, whilst the chosen Saint
Unfolds the Myst'ries of redeeming Love,
Of Grace and Mercy infinite, displays
The high Rewards of Penitence and Life
Reform'd, the Freedom of the Christian Yoke

Avers, and testifies th' eternal League
 'Twixt Happiness and Virtue. Now to crown
 The Preacher's Task, with sweet persuasive Phrase,
 He wins th' enchanted Auditors to Peace,
 Long-suff'ring, Gentleness and social Love,
 The godlike Spirit of his Master's Laws!

Was this the hot vindictive Pharisee?
 O strange Conversion! This th' impetuous Saul,
 That late dire Menaces and Slaughter breath'd?
 Was this, sage † Priest, the Minister of Wrath
 Fix'd by the dreaded Sanction of thy Power
 To hurl Perdition on the rising Church?
 What? Were those Hands, now lifted up to Heav'n
 To bless Man's great Redeemer, once imbrued ‡
 In the pure Blood of his devoted Saints,
 And consecrated Martyrs? Wondrous Change!
 But what can check that all-controuling Power,
 Who turns the Course of Nature at his Will;
 Whose Word was Med'cine to the Sick, whose Call

† The high Priest of *Jerusalem*.

‡ Ὁς ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν ἐδίωξα ἄχρι θανάτου, &c. *Acts* ch. xxii. v. 4.

Awoke the Grave's cold Tenants, whose firm Step
Trode the soft Surface of the Ocean, whilst
His potent Voice bad the curl'd Waves subside,
And hush'd the Wind's wild Uproar into Peace?

Behold! th' illustrious Convert now invades
The Reign of Gentile Darkness. See! appall'd
Black Superstition, with her baleful Throng
Of self-bred Fears, and unembodied Forms.
That haunt Despair, the foul unholy Train
Of molten Idols and fantastic Gods
Shrink at his Presence, like the fleeting Shades
Of fullen Night, when first Hyperion's Orb
Scatters it's purple Radiance o'er the Skies.
Nor long the Majesty of Jove supreme
Withstood the Thunder of the Preacher's Tongue.
Totter'd his Throne, his golden Sceptre fell;
Nor more Olympus trembled at his Nod.
No longer smok'd his odoriferous Shrines
With Frankincense and Myrrh, the fragrant Breath
Of Araby; nor bleeding Hecatomb
Distain'd his blushing Altars. Solemn Praise

And Pray'rs devoutly breath'd, the Tears, the Sighs
Of penitential Grief, the broken Heart
Now form'd the Gentile's purer Sacrifice
To the true God. — The philosophic Lore
Of learned Athens sunk e'er long, eclips'd
By Truth's resistless Blaze. The vain Parade
Of empty Jargon and unmeaning Forms
No longer won the prostituted Praise
Of wond'ring Greece. The Stoic's fond Pretence
Was urg'd no more ; the boasted Apathist
Confess'd the Strength of Nature, own'd the Power,
The Use of Passion, deign'd to feel himself,
And sympathize the Miseries of Man.

Nor long the Dictates of thy sensual Mind
Allur'd th' unwary Step of Youth to Sin,
Lascivious † Sophist ! Thy Disciple erst
That quaff'd the luscious Sweets of Circe's Cup,
Hung on the Siren's fascinating Tongue,
And thrill'd with Transport at the Harlot's Smile,
Now sighs for Pleasures which no Eye hath seen,

† Epicurus.

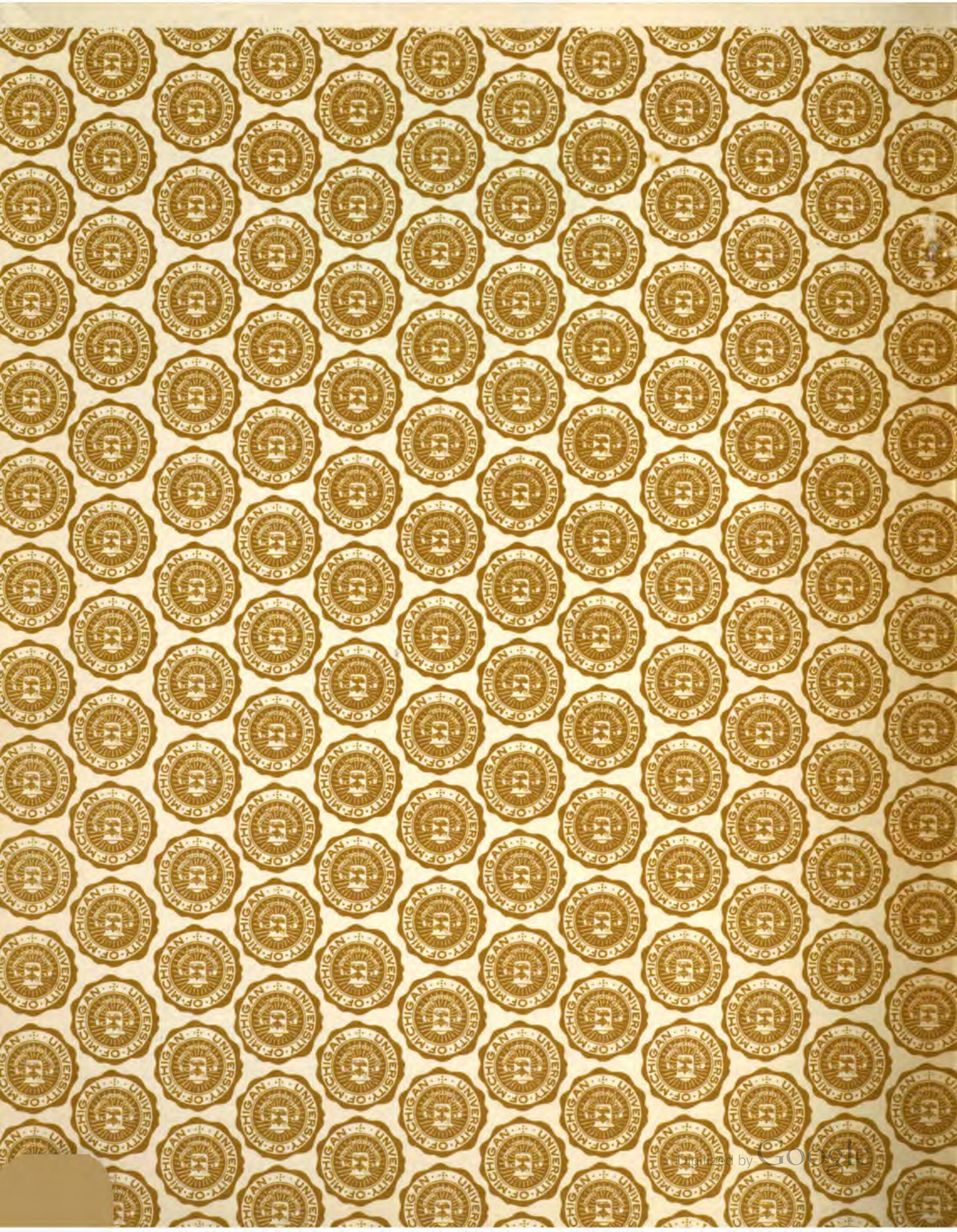
No Ear hath heard, nor mortal Heart conceiv'd.
No more he babbles of thy foolish Dreams
Of self-concurring Atoms, and blind Chance
Omnipotent: where'er he turns his Eyes,
Amaz'd he traces, thro' each wondrous Scene,
The Hand of Providence. Each Attribute
That points th' Almighty Parent of the World
To Man's Conceptions, legibly portray'd
On Nature's Page, th' enlight'ned Convert sees;
And as he views, his elevated Breast,
With inextinguishable Ardor, burns
For Truth, for Life and Immortality.
Where'er the Preacher roll'd the powerful Tide
Of Inspiration, from each fabled Haunt
Foul Error fled, whether the Roman School,
Or Attic Portico her Presence held;
Or the dark Inmate of the Pagan Shrine,
She heap'd vain Incense to some Idol-God.

O! may those living Oracles of Light,
That boast the Sanction of thine hallow'd Pen,
Illustrious Convert! o'er each gloomy Land,

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Where still pale Fear and Superstition reign,
Spread the rich Treasures of immortal Truth.
May the lewd Prophet's Brothel-Paradise,
Base Hope of wretched Ignorance and Lust,
Allure no more the Pilgrim's weary Step
To Mecca's Walls : no longer Fohi's Name
Usurp the prostrate Adoration, due
To God alone : nor more th' unconscious Sun
Provoke the trembling Indian's fruitless Vow.
But may one Mind, one Faith, one Hope, one God
Unite the scatter'd Progeny of Man.

T H E E N D.



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